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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains a summary of a study of private schools. The study examined private schools, how they differ by type (Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian), and how they differ from public schools. Data were collected in 1999 and 2000 from an integrated set of survey instruments that collected information on a wide range of topics from students, teachers, and principals. The study examined characteristics of schools, staff, and students; school location and level; school size; demographic characteristics of students; teachers' influence on school policies; teachers' ratings of school climate and management; and principals and school leadership. The findings are presented in narrative and tabular forms. Following are some of the major findings. Private schools, overall, have fewer students and less diverse student populations than public schools. Catholic schools tend to be larger and have greater diversity in enrollment than other types of private schools. Principals at the three types of schools had different top priorities for their schools, but at least 60 percent in each type included academic excellence. Teachers in private schools reported that they had wide latitude in deciding how and what to teach, as well as fairly strong influence on many school policies. (WFA)

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A Brief Profile of American Private Schools

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National Center for Education Statistics

SASS
Schools and Staffing Survey

U.S. Department of Education
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NCES 2003-417

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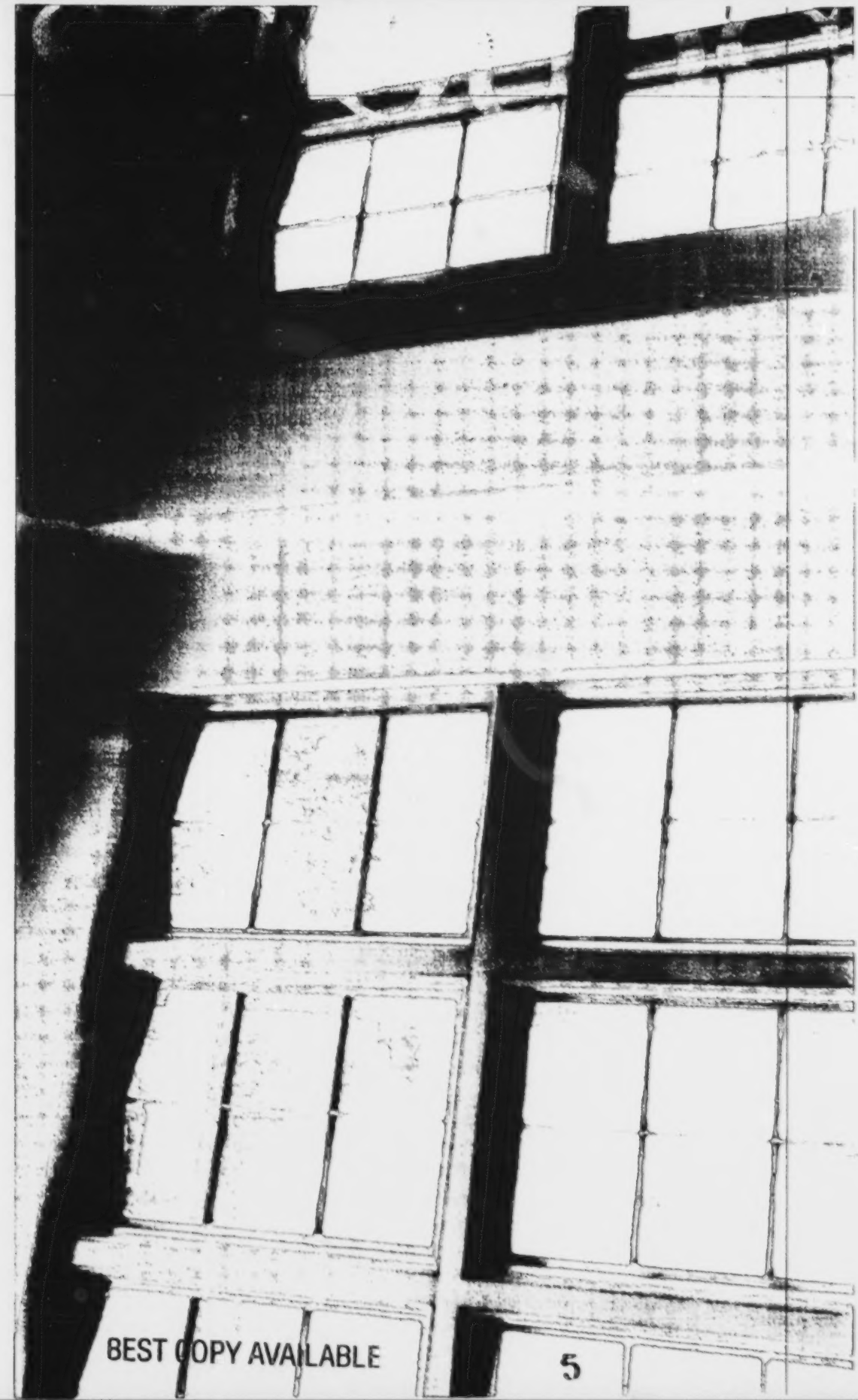

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Introduction

A Brief Profile of America's Private Schools summarizes important findings from the 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). This document examines private schools, how they differ by type (Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian), and how they differ from public schools.

The SASS is an integrated set of surveys that collects information on a wide range of topics about the characteristics of the school, staff, and student population, school climate, and staff perceptions. The Private School Questionnaire includes questions on the students the school serves, programs offered, and various policies, such as high school graduation requirements. The Principal Questionnaire collects data on principals' experience prior to their present position, perceptions of problems in the school, and goals for their students. The Teacher Questionnaire seeks information such as teacher workload, education and experience, and perceptions of working conditions and school climate.

The data presented are from the 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). Schools that had at least one of grades 1–12, or equivalent ungraded classes, are included in the discussion that follows, regardless of whether they also had kindergarten or preschool grades. Public sector data from SASS:1999–2000 include data from public and charter schools and their staffs.

SASS data are published in a variety of reports. For more information about the survey, go to the SASS web site (*http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass*) to find an overview, questionnaires from previous administrations of SASS, and reports that can be viewed or downloaded.

Schools, staff, and students

Private schools may belong to one or more associations, reflecting a particular religious affiliation, a special program or pedagogical emphasis, or some other characteristic of the school. NCES classifies private schools into 19 categories based on the school's predominant characteristic. These 19 affiliations are grouped into 3 types: Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian. Seventy-nine percent of all private schools had a religious affiliation in 1999–2000: 30 percent were affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, 49 percent with other religious groups, and the remaining 22 percent were nonsectarian (table 1). Although Catholic schools accounted for 30 percent of the total number of schools, they enrolled 48 percent of all private school students.

In 1999–2000, approximately 27,000 private schools, with 404,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers, enrolled 5.3 million students. These schools accounted for 24 percent of all schools in the United States, 10 percent of all students, and 12 percent of all FTE teachers.

Table 1. Number and percentage of schools, students, and full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers, by sector and by private school types: 1999–2000

	Number			Percentage of total		
Sector and school type	Schools	Students	Teachers (FTE)	Schools	Students	Teachers (FTE)
Public	84,735	45,366,227	2,905,658	75.7	89.6	87.8
Private	27,223	5,262,849	404,066	24.3	10.4	12.2
Catholic	8,102	2,546,710	152,102	29.8	48.4	37.6
Other religious	13,268	1,871,851	153,071	48.7	35.6	37.9
Nonsectarian	5,853	842,288	98,893	21.5	16.0	24.5

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000. (Previously published as table 1 on p. 3 of *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait* [NCES 2002–013].)

School location and level

Private schools in 1999–2000 were located primarily in central cities (42 percent) and the urban fringe or large towns (40 percent) (table 2). About 18 percent of private schools were found in rural areas. In contrast, 24 percent of all public schools were in central city locations, 45 percent in suburban fringe or large towns, and 31 percent in rural areas. Most schools—61 percent of private and 71 percent of public—were elementary, but 10 percent of private schools and 25 percent of public schools were secondary. Finally, a much higher proportion of private schools (30 percent) were combined schools (usually grades K–12 or 1–12), compared with only 4 percent of public schools.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of schools according to community type and level, by sector and by private school type: 1999–2000

Sector and school type	Community type			Level		
	Central city	Urban fringe/ large town	Rural/ small town	Elementary	Secondary	Combined
Public	24.1	44.6	31.3	71.4	24.6	4.0
Private	42.4	39.9	17.7	60.8	9.5	29.7
Catholic	46.5	41.3	12.2	82.1	13.9	4.1
Other religious	37.6	38.6	23.8	52.9	6.0	41.2
Nonsectarian	47.4	40.9	11.7	49.5	11.4	39.1

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000. (Previously published as table 2 on p. 4 of *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait* [NCES 2002–013].)

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School size

School size is typically related to population density of the local area and its age distribution of children; for private schools, local demand for a school's instructional philosophy also contributes to size of enrollment. The average private school had 193 students in 1999–2000, while the average public school had 535 students (table 3). Among private schools, 80 percent had enrollments of fewer than 300, compared with 29 percent of public schools. Within the private sector, Catholic schools had larger enrollments than other types of schools. About 43 percent of Catholic schools had 150–299 students in 1999–2000 (a higher proportion than in the other two school types), and another 38 percent had 300 or more students. In comparison, 11 to 12 percent of other religious schools and nonsectarian schools had 300 or more students. About 36 to 37 percent of other religious and nonsectarian schools had fewer than 50 students. Such small schools were rare, however, among Catholic schools (1 percent) and in the public sector as a whole (4 percent).

Table 3. Average number of students enrolled and percentage distribution of schools according to enrollment size, by sector and by private school type: 1999–2000

Sector and school type	Average school enrollment	Percentage distribution of schools by size				
		Fewer than 50 students	50–99 students	100–149 students	150–299 students	300 or more students
Public	535	4.0	4.3	4.6	16.2	70.9
Private	193	26.1	16.4	12.1	25.8	19.6
Catholic	315	1.1	7.4	10.3	42.7	38.4
Other religious	141	36.8	19.9	11.0	20.6	11.7
Nonsectarian	144	36.4	20.8	17.1	14.3	11.4

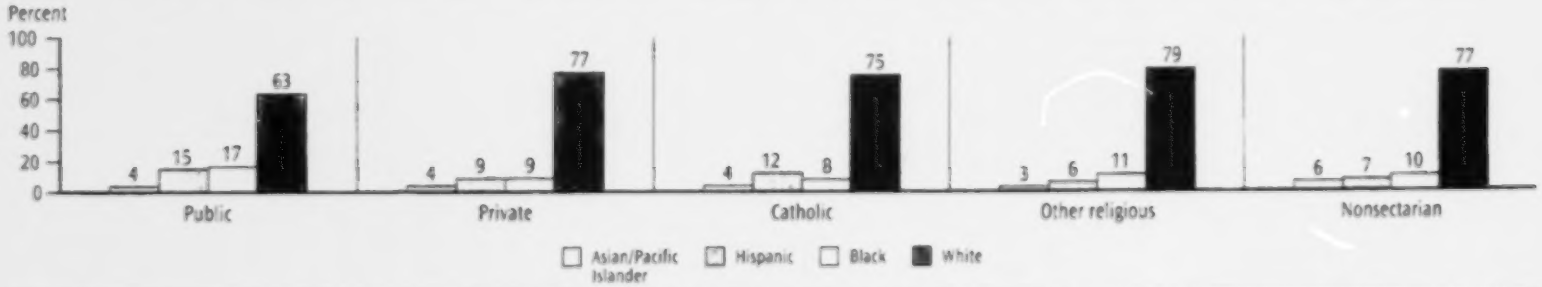
NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000. (Previously published as table 3 on p. 6 of *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait* [NCES 2002–013].)

Demographic characteristics of students

Student populations in different types of private schools and in private and public schools vary on some basic demographic measures, including race/ethnicity. In 1999–2000, some 77 percent of private school students were White, compared with 63 percent of public school students (figure 1). Private schools had lower proportions of Black and Hispanic students than public schools, and no difference was found between the sectors in the proportion of Asian/Pacific Islander students. In Catholic schools, 12 percent of students were Hispanic, a higher proportion than in the other types of private schools.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of students according to race/ethnicity, by sector and private school type: 1999–2000



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. American Indian/Alaska Native accounted for 1 percent of student population in public and Catholic schools and less than 0.5 percent in the three other categories.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Surveys," 1999–2000. (Previously published as figure 3 on p. 9 of *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait* [NCES 2002–013].)

Teachers' influence on school policies

In four areas of school policy linked closely with teaching—establishing curriculum, setting student performance standards, setting discipline policy, and evaluating teachers—the sector differences were substantial (table 4). For example, 68 percent of private school teachers said they had a lot of influence on establishing curriculum, compared with 44 percent of public school teachers. In addition, private school teachers were more likely than public school teachers to say that they had a lot of influence on setting student performance standards (63 percent vs. 38 percent) and student discipline policy (48 percent vs. 30 percent).

In contrast, no difference was found between the two sectors for teachers' reported influence on teacher hiring decisions (about 14 percent for each). In addition to hiring decisions, teachers in both sectors were unlikely to think they had a lot of influence on the content of in-service training, school budget decisions, or evaluating teachers. (However, the sectors did differ on these matters; for example, 19 percent of teachers in private schools versus 8 percent in public schools thought they had a lot of influence on teacher evaluation.)

Table 4. Percentage of teachers who thought they had a lot of influence on various school policies, by private school type: 1999–2000

Sector and school type	Establishing curriculum	Setting student performance standards	Setting discipline policy	Inservice training content	Evaluating teachers	Hiring full-time teachers	School budget decisions
Public	44.3	37.6	30.4	32.5	8.2	14.5	14.0
Private	67.5	62.5	47.9	35.5	18.6	14.1	9.9
Catholic	59.0	56.2	45.1	33.5	13.7	9.8	6.9
Other religious	68.0	65.3	50.7	35.0	17.0	11.4	11.0
Nonsectarian	79.4	67.6	47.6	39.3	28.4	24.6	12.6

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Teacher Surveys," 1999–2000. (Previously published as table 8 on p. 14 of *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait* [NCES 2002–013].)

Teacher's ratings of school climate and management

Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS:1999–2000) data indicate that teachers in private schools for the most part have positive views about their jobs and the extent of staff cooperation and collegiality at their school (table 5). For example, private school teachers were more likely than public school teachers to "strongly agree"[1] that they were generally satisfied with teaching at their school (66 percent vs. 54 percent) and with their class size (60 percent vs. 36 percent) (table 5). In addition, greater proportions of private school than public school teachers agreed that teachers consistently enforce rules of behavior, that most colleagues shared their beliefs about the school's central mission, and that cooperative effort among the staff was high. Moreover, teachers at private schools (42 percent) were much more likely than teachers at public schools (16 percent) to state that they received a great deal of support

[1] "Agree" and "agreed" are used hereafter for brevity, but all the data discussed in this section reflect the percentage of teachers who strongly agreed with the statement mentioned.

Table 5. Percentage of teachers who strongly agreed with various statements about the school's professional climate and working conditions, by sector and by private school type: 1999–2000

Sector and school type	I am satisfied with teaching at this school	I am satisfied with my class size	Most colleagues share school's mission	Staff cooperative effort is high	I receive lots of parent support for my work	I consciously coordinate courses with other teachers	Rules are consistently enforced by teachers
Public	53.7	35.8	33.2	33.9	15.6	38.0	22.8
Private	66.4	60.0	59.9	56.0	42.4	39.3	37.8
Catholic	62.9	46.5	55.3	50.2	40.0	37.4	36.8
Other religious	71.3	67.7	72.3	63.5	48.1	41.4	41.9
Nonsectarian	64.1	68.0	47.4	53.1	37.1	38.8	33.0

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Teacher Surveys," 1999–2000. (Previously published as table 9 on p. 16 of *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait* [NCES 2002–013].)

from parents for their work. No differences were detected between sectors or among private school types in the percentage who agreed that they consciously coordinated course content with other teachers.

Teachers at other religious schools agreed with five positive statements about their school's professional climate and working conditions at higher rates than those of teachers at Catholic and nonsectarian schools. Topics of these statements concerned satisfaction with teaching at the school in general, colleagues' shared beliefs about the school's mission, staff cooperative effort, support from parents, and teachers' consistent enforcement of rules.

A majority of private school teachers agreed that their principal enforced school rules, expressed expectations for staff, and clearly communicated the kind of school he or she wanted (table 6). A majority of private school teachers also agreed that the administration was supportive and encouraging and that necessary materials were available. For each of these aspects, as well as thinking that staff members were recognized for doing a good job, public school teachers were less likely than private school teachers to agree with the positive statement. Indeed, no more than 50 percent of teachers in public schools agreed with any of these statements.

A majority of private school teachers thought their principal performed well in enforcing rules, communicating expectations and goals, and supporting teachers. However, SASS: 1999–2000 data indicate that private schools did not show much of an advantage in this area of principals' leadership on instruction. Teachers in both sectors were unlikely to report that the principal often discussed instructional practices with them: 15 percent in the private sector and 11 percent in the public sector agreed that their principals did so.[2] Teachers in other religious schools

[2]These two percentages do differ but also indicate that principals in both sectors were unlikely to engage teachers on instructional practices often.

(18 percent) were more likely to say that their principals frequently discussed instruction than those in either Catholic (14 percent) or nonsectarian schools (13 percent).

Within the private sector, teachers at other religious schools were more likely than those at the other two private school types to agree with several statements regarding school management: that the administration was supportive and encouraging, that their principal enforced school rules, that school goals were communicated clearly, and that staff members were recognized for doing a good job. Forty-six percent of other religious school teachers agreed with the last statement, compared with about 36 percent of teachers in the two other school types.

Table 6. Percentage of teachers who strongly agreed with various statements about the school's principal and management, by sector and by private school type: 1999–2000

Sector and school type	Principal enforces school rules	School goals are communicated clearly	Administration is supportive and encouraging	Necessary materials are available	Principal expresses expectations for staff	Staff are recognized for good work	Principal often discusses instructional practices
Public	47.4	48.1	41.8	37.2	49.7	25.7	11.0
Private	62.7	61.3	59.8	60.2	56.5	39.8	15.4
Catholic	59.2	59.1	56.1	53.2	55.9	36.5	14.1
Other religious	68.3	66.4	67.3	64.0	60.5	45.7	18.1
Nonsectarian	59.4	56.5	53.6	64.5	51.1	35.7	12.9

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Teacher Surveys," 1999–2000. (Previously published as table 10 on p. 17 of *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait* [NCES 2002–013].)

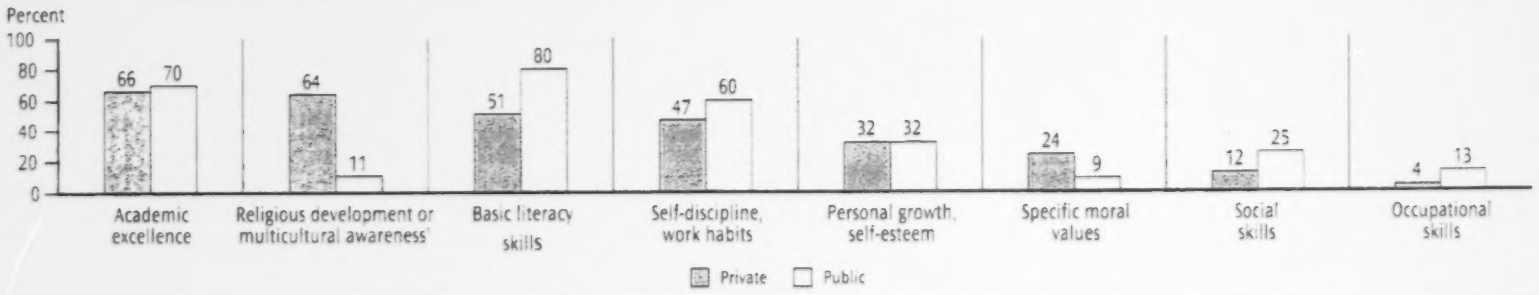
Principals and school leadership

The principal's top-priority goals, if communicated effectively to teachers and other staff, can influence both daily practices and the professional climate at the school. Public school principals in 1999–2000 were most likely to name among their top three goals building basic literacy skills in core areas like reading, writing, and mathematics (80 percent) (figure 2).

Other goals cited frequently by public school principals were encouraging academic excellence (70 percent) and developing self-discipline and good work habits (60 percent). Principals in private schools were about equally likely to include academic excellence (66 percent) and fostering religious/spiritual development[3] (64 percent) among their highest three goals. Literacy skills (51 percent) and developing self-discipline (47 percent) were also included often as top-three private school goals.

[3]Private school principals rated "fostering religious or spiritual development" as one of the eight goals, while public school principals instead rated "promoting multicultural awareness or understanding."

Figure 2. Percentage of principals who rated each of eight educational goals among the three most important for their school, by sector: 1999–2000

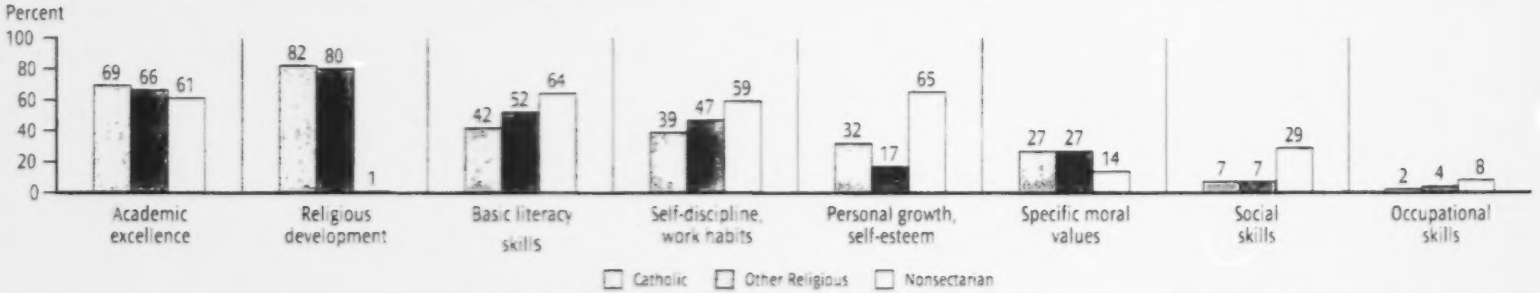


[1]Private school principals were given "religious or spiritual development" to rate, while public school principals were given "multicultural awareness" instead.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Principal Surveys," 1999–2000. (Previously published as figure 7 on p. 19 of *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait* [NCES 2002–013].)

The percentage of all private school principals who included religious development as a top goal disguises the large differences across school types for this measure: principals in Catholic and other religious schools cited religious development more often than any other goal (80 to 82 percent of these principals cited it), while hardly any nonsectarian school principals did so (1 percent) (figure 3). At both types of religious schools, academic excellence was included as a high-priority goal by 66 to 69 percent of the principals (second after religious development), followed by building literacy skills (42 to 52 percent) and developing self-discipline (39 to 47 percent).

Figure 3. Percentage of principals who rated each of eight educational goals among the three most important for their school, by private school type: 1999–2000



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public, Public Charter, and Private School Principal Surveys," 1999–2000. (Previously published as figure 8 on p. 20 of *Private Schools: A Brief Portrait* [NCES 2002–013].)

Nonsectarian school principals had a somewhat different pattern of priorities; between 59 and 65 percent included developing personal growth/self-esteem, literacy skills, academic excellence, and promoting self-discipline among their top three goals. In addition, nonsectarian school principals were more likely than those at the other two school types to include social skills development (29 percent vs. 7 percent at Catholic and other religious schools). About 59 percent of nonsectarian school principals included developing self-discipline among their top three goals, more than the 47 percent at other religious schools, which in turn was more than the 39 percent at Catholic schools. Principals' ratings for teaching basic literacy skills followed a similar pattern by school type. About 27 percent of both Catholic and other religious school principals included teaching specific moral values, roughly twice the 14 percent for principals of nonsectarian schools.

Conclusion

In addition to differences between private and public schools, within each sector schools vary in size, level, community type, and student populations. Differences in internal management practices, staff cohesiveness, top-priority goals, and professional climate also appear between and within each sector. Some characteristics of private schools vary widely according to the type of school, while others do not.

Private schools overall have fewer students and less diverse student bodies than public schools, and Catholic schools tend to be larger and have greater diversity in enrollment than other types of private schools. Teachers in private schools report that they have wide latitude in deciding how and what to teach, as well as fairly strong influence on many school policies. Nonsectarian schools, in particular, may give teachers greater influence in shaping their school's activities. In contrast, though the majority of teachers in each private school type agreed with positive statements about staff cooperation and the school's management, teachers at other religious schools were more likely than other private school teachers to agree strongly with many of these statements. Teachers at other religious schools were particularly likely to give their administrators high marks, and to report that their colleagues shared similar beliefs about their school's central mission and that rules were enforced consistently.

Principals at the three types of private schools had different top priorities for their schools, but at least 60 percent in each school type included academic excellence. Public school principals most often cited teaching basic literacy skills as one of their top three goals (80 percent included it), while 51 percent of private school principals did so.

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- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Private Schools: a Brief Portrait*, (NCES 2002–013), by Martha Naomi Alt and Katharin Peter. Washington, DC: 2002.

Notes

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- *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999–2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NCES 2002–313).

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